



SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR INTERMEDIATION BETWEEN USERS AND AVATAR PROVIDERS TO PROVIDE VARIOUS AVATAR IMAGES TO USERS

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

5 Field of the Invention

The present invention relates to a method for receiving and displaying images through an electronic network, and more particularly to system and method for allowing users to freely select and use various avatar images provided by a plurality of avatar image providers.

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Description of the Related Art

An avatar is another virtual self, expressing the user himself/herself in a cyber space. This avatar is generally provided to a user through Internet service systems such as a community site, a portal site or an Internet shopping mall, or sometimes provided 15 directly from an avatar provider.

In the conventional avatar service, one service system or one avatar providing system provides only one type of avatar image, so avatar images in the system are very monotonous. Thus, young generations who seek variety are apt to be easily tired of their avatar, so the monotonous avatar image impedes spread of the avatar.

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In addition, when changes existing avatar service or an existing avatar provider, the Internet service provider should change its service system since the avatar is not compatible.

Thus, there is a need to develop a technique which allows users to use various types of avatar provided by a plurality of avatar providers without changing the system.

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SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is designed to solve the problems of the prior art, and therefore it is an object of the present invention to provide a method for allowing users to use various types of avatar without system change by using an intermediating system 5 between a plurality of avatar providers and an Internet service provider.

In addition, another object of the invention is to provide avatar intermediating system and method which are capable of interfacing between a plurality of avatar providers and a program using avatar like an instant messenger of a user terminal.

According to one aspect of the invention, the present invention provides an avatar 10 intermediating system, which includes an avatar providing device for storing avatar data having avatar image and avatar item image and providing the avatar data through a network; an avatar service device for receiving the avatar data from the avatar providing device and supplying the avatar data in a shape of web document or the like; a user terminal for outputting the avatar data through the avatar service device or a client 15 program like a messenger; and an avatar intermediating device for introducing the avatar data provided from at least one avatar providing device, intermediating transaction of the avatar data between a selected one of the avatar providing devices and the user terminal, receiving a changed avatar image from the corresponding avatar providing device in response to an avatar change request, and then changing a representative avatar image of 20 the avatar service device or the client program into the changed avatar image.

Preferably, the avatar providing device includes a storage area for storing the purchased avatar data for each user; an avatar composing unit for generating a perfect avatar image by combining the avatar image stored in the storage area with various avatar item images; a unit for providing the perfect avatar image to the avatar 25 intermediating device in response to the change request of the user; and a unit for

providing transaction information of the corresponding avatar data to the avatar intermediating device in response to a purchase request of a specific avatar data from the user.

Preferably, the avatar intermediating device includes an avatar purchasing unit for
5 providing an avatar data list from at least one avatar providing device to users, transmitting a purchase request of a specific avatar data from a user to the corresponding avatar providing device when the user requests for purchasing the avatar data, outputting the avatar purchasing information received from the avatar providing device to the user, receiving payment information from the user, and then transmitting payment settlement
10 to the avatar providing device, and an avatar storage area for storing a composed avatar image transmitted from the avatar providing device for each user.

In this case, the avatar intermediating system may further include an avatar changing unit for receiving and storing an avatar image change request and a changed avatar data from a specific avatar providing device, and informing the avatar service
15 device or the client program of the user terminal that the avatar image is changed.

Preferably, the avatar changing unit includes a unit for receiving change request information from a specific avatar providing device, inputting a change request item into a wait queue, and storing temporary avatar information into a database; a unit for reading the stored change request item from the wait queue and requesting transmission of the
20 avatar data to the corresponding avatar providing device; a unit for receiving and storing the avatar data transmitted from the avatar providing device and restoring the temporary avatar information stored in the database; and a unit for informing the avatar service device or the client program of the user terminal that the avatar image is changed.

Preferably, the change request item includes user identification information and
25 avatar provider identification information.

In addition, the temporary avatar information preferably includes user identification information and a temporary avatar URL.

The avatar intermediating device may further include an avatar display unit for providing the avatar image stored in the avatar storage area to the client program or the 5 avatar service device in response to an avatar display request from the client program of the user terminal or the avatar service device.

Preferably, the avatar display unit performs receiving avatar display information including user identification information, kind of avatar, avatar countenance or the like from the client program of the user terminal or the avatar service device; determining on 10 the basis of the avatar display information whether the avatar to be provided is a formal avatar or a temporary avatar; and requesting provision of the avatar image to the avatar providing device in case of temporary avatar, and providing an avatar image stored in the avatar storage area in case of formal avatar.

According to another aspect of the invention, there is also provided an avatar 15 intermediating method for executing an avatar intermediating system which interfaces between a plurality of avatar providing systems and an avatar-using Internet service system or an avatar-using program of a user terminal via a network in order to reflect an avatar image, set by selection of a user among various types of avatar images provided from a plurality of avatar providing systems, on the avatar-using Internet service system 20 or the avatar-using program of the user terminal, wherein the method includes the steps of building a user information database for storing and managing user identification information and avatar display information corresponding to the user identification information, and an avatar provider information database for storing and managing environment and data of a plurality of avatar providing systems; setting a representative 25 avatar image to be displayed in the avatar-using Internet service system or the avatar-

using program of the user terminal, and storing the representative avatar image into an avatar storage area; accessing the avatar intermediating system via the network and inputting user identification information; outputting a list of avatar providing systems connected to the avatar intermediating system and an avatar data list of each avatar providing system to the user; purchasing a specific avatar image or avatar item in the avatar data list, and storing the purchased avatar data into the corresponding avatar providing system together with the user identification information; composing an avatar image with the use of the avatar image and avatar item stored in a specific avatar providing system, and requesting the corresponding avatar providing system to change the representative avatar image into the composed avatar image; transmitting the avatar image change request to the avatar intermediating system; informing the avatar-using Internet service system or the avatar-using program of the user terminal on the basis of the avatar image change request that the avatar image is changed; and receiving the avatar image from the corresponding avatar providing system according to the avatar image change request, and updating the representative avatar image of the avatar storage area on the basis of the received avatar image.

Preferably, the avatar image updating step includes receiving the avatar image change request, inputting a change request item (the user identification information and the avatar provider identification information) into a wait queue, and storing temporary avatar information (the user identification information and URL of the temporary avatar) into a database; reading the stored change request item from the wait queue and requesting transmission of the avatar data to the corresponding avatar providing device; and receiving the avatar image transmitted from the corresponding avatar providing system to update the representative avatar image of the avatar storage area, and restoring the temporary avatar information of the user information database.

In this case, the avatar intermediating method may further include the steps of, in the avatar-using program informed of the avatar change from the avatar intermediating system, transmitting the avatar display information including user identification information, kind of avatar, avatar countenance or the like to the avatar intermediating system in order to display the changed avatar image; and in the avatar intermediating system, determining whether the transmitted avatar display information is coincident with the avatar display information stored in the user information database; determined whether an avatar included in the corresponding avatar display information is a temporary avatar or a formal avatar in case the information is coincident; and updating and displaying the representative avatar image on the basis of the URL of the temporary avatar stored in the user information database in case of temporary avatar, on the while, transmitting the avatar image stored in the avatar storage area to the user terminal, and updating and displaying the representative avatar image in case of formal avatar.

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BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

Other objects and aspects of the present invention will become apparent from the following description of embodiments with reference to the accompanying drawing in which:

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FIG. 1 shows configuration of a network system in which an avatar intermediating method according to the present invention is realized;

FIG. 2 shows detailed configuration of an avatar providing system and an avatar intermediating system of FIG. 1;

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FIG. 3 is a flow chart for illustrating the process of purchasing an avatar image or avatar item from a specific avatar providing system through the avatar intermediating system according to the present invention;

FIG. 4 is a flowchart for illustrating the process of changing a representative avatar set in the messenger of a user terminal through the avatar intermediating system;

FIG. 5 shows functional processes for executing the process of FIG. 4; and

5 FIG. 6 is a flowchart for illustrating the process of displaying an avatar on the service system or the user terminal through the avatar intermediating system according to the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENT

Hereinafter, avatar intermediating system and method according to the present 10 invention will be described in more detail with reference to the drawings.

Referring to FIG. 1, the avatar intermediating system 200 of the present invention is interposed between a plurality of avatar providing systems 300a to 300c and a plurality of Internet service systems 100a to 100c and provides various types of avatar images to each Internet service system 100a to 100c. A user accesses the avatar intermediating 15 system 200 by using a user terminal 10a to 10c in which a browser program and an instant messenger program are installed. Thus, the user terminals 10a to 10c are connected to the Internet service systems 100a to 100c through a computer network 50, representatively Internet.

The network 50 is used to designate a wired Internet, which is represented by a 20 world wide web (WWW). However, the network is not limited to WWW in the present invention, but may include other types of networks such as wireless Internet based on a wireless communication network.

Now, the avatar providing system 300 and the avatar intermediating system 200 are described in more detail with reference to FIG. 2.

25 First, the Internet service system 100 of the present invention is a computer

system having a web server 120 for providing WWW service to the user terminal 10 and an instant messenger server 130 for providing messenger service. Preferably, the Internet service system 100 acts as a virtual service space on Internet, which provides various kinds of online service by means of avatar like a portal search site, a community site and an electronic commerce site.

The user terminal 10 may be a personal computer (PC), a workstation, a cellular phone capable of data communication, PDA or other smaller or larger computer systems. The user terminal 10 typically includes one or more processor, memory and I/O device. A user of the user terminal 10, for example, wishes to access an information record stored by the web server 120. This information record may be shaped as a wired/wireless web page. This web page may be a data record such as not only text information having simple contents but also more complicatedly digitally encoded multimedia contents having software program, graphic, audio signals or picture image. In particular, the user may display his/her own avatar on a monitor of the user terminal 10 through the web page.

In addition, the user terminal 10 includes an operating system (OS) for supervising and managing hardware and software of the system for better efficiency, a web browser program 2 such as Navigator or Explorer for positioning the web page, and an instant messenger program 5 which is an application program of a client for transmitting document file, graphic file or voice file through Internet. The instant messenger program 5 is capable of not only simple file transmission but also 1:1 conversation and group discussion.

Thus, a user may display his/her own avatar image on the user terminal 10 without access to the Internet service system 100 by using the instant messenger 5, as well as receive an avatar image of the opponent from the instant messenger server 130

and display it on the user terminal 10.

The avatar intermediating system 200 of the present invention includes a web server 210, an avatar intermediating module 220, and a storage device. The avatar intermediating module 220 has a transaction managing unit 230, an avatar change managing unit 240, a user managing unit 260, an avatar display managing unit 250, and a user identification unit 221.

In addition, the storage device includes a database system such as an avatar provider information database 294, a payment information database 293 and a user information database 292, and an avatar storage area 291.

The transaction managing unit 230 of the avatar intermediating module 220 is a program module for executing an avatar transaction process shown in FIG. 3. That is, the transaction managing unit 230 is linked with a product transaction module 340 of the avatar providing system 300 to provide an avatar image list, dispatched from a plurality of avatar providing systems 300, to the user terminal 10 in a format of web page, transmits a purchase request to the product transaction module 340 of the corresponding avatar providing system when a user requests to purchase an avatar, receives detailed transaction information from the corresponding avatar providing system 300, executes a payment process, and then transmits a payment result to the avatar providing system 300.

In addition, the transaction managing unit 230 stores transaction-related and payment-related data generated by the transaction process into the payment information database 293.

The avatar change managing unit 240 of the avatar intermediating system 200 is a program module for executing an avatar changing process shown in FIGs. 4 and 5 in connection with an avatar setting module 360 of the avatar providing system 300.

When receiving an avatar change request from the avatar providing system 300, the

avatar change managing unit 240 updating a representative avatar data in the avatar storage area 291 by setting a temporary avatar or receiving an avatar data from the avatar providing system 300, and then informs the Internet service system 100 or the instant messenger program 5 of the user terminal 10 that the representative avatar is changed.

5 The user managing unit 260 of the avatar intermediately system 200 is a program module for processing that a user joins to or secedes from the intermediately system. In particular, the user managing unit 260 executes a secession process of a user in connection with a secession processing module 350 of the avatar providing system 300.

10 The avatar display managing unit 250 of the avatar intermediately system 200 is a program process for executing an avatar display process shown in FIG. 6 in connection with an avatar display module 330 of the avatar providing system 300.

15 The avatar display managing unit 250 receives avatar display information from the Internet service system 100 or the instant messenger program 5 of the user terminal 10, checks whether the received avatar display information is coincident with avatar display information stored in the user information database 292, and then provides a temporary avatar URL or a changed avatar image in the avatar storage area 291.

The user identification unit 221 of the avatar intermediately system 200 is connected with the Internet service system 100 in order to identify a user on the basis of logging-in information (e.g., ID and password of the user) received from the user.

20 The avatar provider information database 294 is a database for storing and managing environment and data of a plurality of the avatar providing systems 300a to 300c.

25 The payment information database 293 stores and manages transaction-related payment information transmitted from the transaction managing unit 230, and the user information database 292 store and manages personal information of a user (e.g., name,

resident registration number, phone number, email address, address or the like), user identification information, avatar display information, temporary avatar information and so on.

In addition, the avatar storage area 291 is a storage area for storing a representative avatar image to be displayed on the Internet service system or the user terminal, for each user. The avatar information stored in the avatar storage area 291 may include picture image, 3D graphic, moving picture, audio information and so on.

The avatar providing system 300 of the present invention, which provides various types of avatar information through the aforementioned avatar intermediately system 200, includes a web server 310, an avatar providing module 320, a transaction information database 380 and an avatar storage area 370.

The avatar providing module 320 again includes an avatar display module 330, a product transaction module 340, a secession processing module 350 and an avatar setting module 360.

The product transaction module 340 of the avatar providing system 300 is a program module for executing a product transaction process shown in FIG. 3 in connection with the transaction managing unit 230 of the avatar intermediately system 200. In other words, the product transaction module 340 provides a transaction list related to avatar image and avatar item to the avatar intermediately system 200, extracts and provides transaction information related to a corresponding product according to a purchase request of the transaction managing unit 230, and stores the purchased avatar image or avatar item for each user.

The avatar setting module 360 of the avatar providing system 300 is a program module for executing an avatar changing process shown in FIGs. 4 and 5 in connection with the avatar change managing unit 240 of the avatar intermediately system 200. The

avatar setting module 360 composes a perfect avatar image by composing an existing avatar image with an avatar item selected by the user and then stores the perfect avatar image. And then, if the user requests to change the existing representative avatar image with the composed avatar image, the avatar setting module 360 transmits this request to 5 the avatar change managing unit 240 of the avatar intermediating system 200. In addition, if the changed avatar image is transmitted from the avatar change managing unit 240, the avatar setting module 360 extracts the avatar image of the corresponding user from the avatar storage area 370, and then transmits the avatar image to the avatar change managing unit 240.

10 The avatar display module 330 of the avatar providing system 300 is a program module for displaying an avatar image set in the Internet service system 100 or an avatar-using program of the user terminal, in connection with the avatar display managing unit 250 of the avatar intermediating system 200.

15 The secession processing module 350 of the avatar providing system 300 is a program module for executing a secession process of a user in connection with the user managing unit 260 of the avatar intermediating system 200.

The transaction information database 380 of the avatar providing system 300 is a database for storing and managing information related to avatar image and avatar item sold according to the request of user.

20 The avatar storage area 370 of the avatar providing system 300 stores avatar images composed by users, for each user.

As described above, if desiring to display his/her own avatar on the Internet service system or the instant messenger, a user accesses the avatar intermediating system, selects an avatar providing system which provides a favorite avatar image, purchases 25 various avatar items from the avatar providing system, generates a perfect avatar image

by suitably composing the purchased items with his/her own avatar image, and then displays this image as a representative avatar image. In addition, the user may easily change an existing representative avatar image with an avatar image provided by another avatar providing image through the avatar intermediating system and then display the 5 changed avatar image.

Hereinafter, a method for purchasing, changing and displaying avatar according to the present invention is described in detail with reference to FIG. 3.

A user accesses a specific Internet service system 100 (S100), and then completes 10 user identification by inputting logging-in information to the Internet service system 100 (S105). At this time, the user identification unit 221 executes the user identification in connection with the Internet service system 100 with reference to the user information database 292 (S110).

If proved as a proper user, a transaction list including an avatar-related product 15 list is displayed on the user terminal. This transaction list screen shows a list of avatar providers connected to the avatar intermediating system together with detailed product information by drawing the screen from the avatar providing system, or receiving and processing relevant information from the avatar providing system (S115).

Then, the user checks the avatar product list and selects a specific product (e.g., 20 avatar image or avatar item) (S120). After that, the user requests to purchase the selected product (e.g., by clicking a purchase button) (S125).

The transaction managing unit 230 of the avatar intermediating system 200 then transmits the purchase request to the product transaction module 340 of the corresponding avatar providing system, and then extracts transaction information 25 corresponding to the purchase request (e.g., product information, transaction ID, price

and so on) from the database. The extracted transaction information is transmitted to the transaction managing unit 230 of the avatar intermediating system 200 by means of the product transaction module 340 (S130 and S135).

If receiving the transaction information from the product transaction module 340,
5 the transaction managing unit 230 requests a payment to the user (S140). At this time, it is preferred that an instant payment and a debit payment are all possible. If the payment is completed, the corresponding payment information is stored in the payment information database 293 (S145), and the completion of payment is informed to the product transaction module 340 (S150).

10 If informed of the completion of payment from the transaction managing unit 230 of the avatar intermediating system 200, the product transaction module 340 stores the corresponding item for the user (S155 and S160).

By means of the above-mentioned transaction process, a user may purchase various items to be combined with his/her own avatar image from each avatar providing 15 system and then store the items in his/her own cabinet. In other words, without visiting the avatar providing systems one by one as conventionally, the user may purchase avatar-related products from a plurality of avatar providing systems just by accessing the avatar intermediating system and passing through the user identification.

If purchasing various avatar items through the transaction process through the 20 avatar intermediating system, a user may change a representative avatar image through the process of FIGs. 4 and 5.

In order to change the representative avatar image displayed in the Internet service system or the avatar-using program, the user perfects an avatar image with the use of the items purchased by the process of FIG. 3 from a desired avatar providing 25 system. If the avatar image to be replaced with an existing representative avatar image

is perfected, the user requests a change of avatar to the avatar setting module 360 of the corresponding avatar providing system. In other words, an avatar change requesting unit 361 of the avatar setting module 360 generates change request information including user ID and avatar provider ID, and then transmits the change request information to the 5 avatar change managing unit 240 of the avatar intermediately system 200 (S200).

If receiving the change request information from the avatar providing system 300, an avatar change request processing module 241 of the avatar change managing unit 240 changes temporary avatar information in the user information database 292 (S205 and S210), and then an avatar change informing module 244 informs the Internet service 10 system and the instant messenger program 5 of the user terminal that the avatar is changed (S215).

The Internet service system or the messenger, informed from the avatar change request processing module 241 of the avatar intermediately system 200 that the avatar is changed, then temporarily stores the fact (S265).

15 After completing the setting of the temporary avatar for changing the representative avatar image, the avatar change request processing module 241 adds a change request item in a change request wait queue 242 (S220).

As mentioned above, the avatar intermediately system does not process the avatar 20 change request instantly but sets the temporary avatar so that the changed avatar image may be provided when a request for display the avatar is received from the Internet service system or the messenger before the process for the avatar change request is finished.

An avatar transmission module 243 of the avatar change managing unit 240 reads a change request item from a head of the change request wait queue 242 (S225), and then 25 requests transmission of the changed avatar image to an avatar transmission server 362

on the basis of the change request information designated by the change request item (S230).

The avatar transmission server 362 then extracts the perfect changed avatar image from the avatar storage area 370 on the response to the changed avatar transmission request including user ID from the avatar transmission module 243 of the avatar intermediating system 200, and then transmits the extracted changed avatar data to the avatar transmission module 243 of the avatar intermediating system 200 (S235 and S240).

If receiving the changed avatar data (S245), the avatar transmission module 243 updates an existing avatar image stored in the avatar storage area 291 into the changed 10 avatar data (S250).

After updating the avatar data, the avatar transmission module 243 restores the temporary avatar information of the user information database 292 as it was (S255), and the avatar change informing module 244 informs the Internet service system 100 and the instant messenger program 5 of the user terminal 10 that the avatar is changed (S260).

15 If being informed from the avatar change informing module 244 of the avatar intermediating system 200 that the avatar is changed, the Internet service system and/or the messenger temporarily memorizes this fact (S270).

If the user newly accesses the Internet service system or newly executes the instant messenger in the state of already requesting the change of his/her own 20 representative avatar image, the changed avatar image is displayed through the Internet service system or the instant messenger as shown in FIG. 6.

Referring to FIG. 6, if a user accesses the Internet service system or executes the messenger of the user terminal, the Internet service system or the messenger transmits 25 avatar display information to the avatar display managing unit 250 of the avatar intermediating system 200 on the basis of the change history of the temporarily stored

avatar. If receiving the avatar display information from the Internet service system or the messenger, the avatar display managing unit 250 compares the received display information with display information stored in the user information database 292 in order to determine whether they are coincident (S300 and S305).

5 If it is checked that the display information is coincident, the avatar display managing unit 250 determines whether the avatar to be displayed is a temporary avatar (S310). At this time, if the avatar is determined as a temporary avatar, the avatar display managing unit 250 requests transmission of the corresponding avatar image to the avatar providing system on the basis of a temporary avatar URL in the user information 10 database (S315).

If receiving the request for transmission of the avatar image from the avatar intermediating system 200, the avatar display module 330 of the avatar providing system 300 calls a resource corresponding to the temporary avatar URL from the avatar storage area 370, and then transmits the called avatar data to the user terminal (S320, S325 and 15 S330).

On the other hand, if it is determined that the avatar to be displayed is a formal avatar in the step S310, the avatar display managing unit 250 reads the avatar data from the avatar storage area 291, and then transmits the avatar data to the user terminal (S350 and S355).

20 As described above, if receiving the changed avatar data from the avatar providing system or the avatar intermediating system, the Internet service system or the messenger of the user terminal updates an existing representative avatar image into the received avatar image and then displays the received avatar image (S360 and S365).

The avatar intermediating system and method according to the present invention allow a user to set various types of images, provided from a plurality of avatar providing systems, as his/her own avatar without changing the Internet service system. In particular, the present invention enables to easily change and display an existing avatar 5 image into an entirely different type of avatar image.

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An avatar intermediating system comprising:
 - an avatar providing device for storing avatar data having avatar image and avatar item image and providing the avatar data through a network;
 - an avatar service device for receiving the avatar data from the avatar providing device and supplying the avatar data in a shape of web document or the like;
 - a user terminal for outputting the avatar data through the avatar service device or a client program like a messenger; and
- 10 an avatar intermediating device for introducing the avatar data provided from at least one avatar providing device, intermediating transaction of the avatar data between a selected one of the avatar providing devices and the user terminal, receiving a changed avatar image from the corresponding avatar providing device in response to an avatar change request, and then changing a representative avatar image of the avatar service device or the client program into the changed avatar image.
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2. An avatar intermediating system according to claim 1, wherein the avatar providing device includes:
 - a storage means for storing the purchased avatar data for each user;
 - 20 an avatar composing means for generating a perfect avatar image by combining the avatar image stored in the storage means with various avatar item images;
 - means for providing the perfect avatar image to the avatar intermediating device in response to the change request of the user; and
 - means for providing transaction information of the corresponding avatar data to
 - 25 the avatar intermediating device in response to a purchase request of a specific avatar

data from the user.

3. An avatar intermediating system according to claim 2, wherein the avatar intermediating device includes:

5 an avatar purchasing means for providing an avatar data list from at least one avatar providing device to users, transmitting a purchase request of a specific avatar data from a user to the corresponding avatar providing device when the user requests for purchasing the avatar data, outputting the avatar purchasing information received from the avatar providing device to the user, receiving payment information from the user, and
10 then transmitting payment settlement to the avatar providing device, and

an avatar storage means for storing a composed avatar image transmitted from the avatar providing device for each user.

4. An avatar intermediating system according to claim 3, further comprising

15 an avatar changing means for receiving and storing an avatar image change request and a changed avatar data from a specific avatar providing device, and informing the avatar service device or the client program of the user terminal that the avatar image is changed.

5. An avatar intermediating system according to claim 4, wherein the avatar

20 changing means includes:

means for receiving change request information from a specific avatar providing device, inputting a change request item into a wait queue, and storing temporary avatar information into a database;

25 means for reading the stored change request item from the wait queue and requesting transmission of the avatar data to the corresponding avatar providing device;

means for receiving and storing the avatar data transmitted from the avatar providing device and restoring the temporary avatar information stored in the database; and

means for informing the avatar service device or the client program of the user 5 terminal that the avatar image is changed.

6. An avatar intermediating system according to claim 5, wherein the change request item includes user identification information and avatar provider identification information.

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7. An avatar intermediating system according to claim 5, wherein the temporary avatar information includes user identification information and a temporary avatar URL.

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8. An avatar intermediating system according to claim 5, wherein the avatar intermediating device further includes an avatar display means for providing the avatar image stored in the avatar storage means to the client program or the avatar service device in response to an avatar display request from the client program of the user terminal or the avatar service device.

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9. An avatar intermediating system according to claim 8, wherein the avatar display means performs:
receiving avatar display information including user identification information, kind of avatar, avatar countenance or the like from the client program of the user 25 terminal or the avatar service device;

determining on the basis of the avatar display information whether the avatar to be provided is a formal avatar or a temporary avatar; and

requesting provision of the avatar image to the avatar providing device in case of temporary avatar, and providing an avatar image stored in the avatar storage means in

5 case of formal avatar.

10. An avatar intermediating method for executing an avatar intermediating system which interfaces between a plurality of avatar providing systems and an avatar-using Internet service system or an avatar-using program of a user terminal via a network in order to reflect an avatar image, set by selection of a user among various types of 10 avatar images provided from a plurality of avatar providing systems, on the avatar-using Internet service system or the avatar-using program of the user terminal, the method comprising the steps of:

building a user information database for storing and managing user identification 15 information and avatar display information corresponding to the user identification information, and an avatar provider information database for storing and managing environment and data of a plurality of avatar providing systems;

setting a representative avatar image to be displayed in the avatar-using Internet service system or the avatar-using program of the user terminal, and storing the 20 representative avatar image into an avatar storage means;

accessing the avatar intermediating system via the network and inputting user identification information;

outputting a list of avatar providing systems connected to the avatar intermediating system and an avatar data list of each avatar providing system to the user;

25 purchasing a specific avatar image or avatar item in the avatar data list, and

storing the purchased avatar data into the corresponding avatar providing system together with the user identification information;

composing an avatar image with the use of the avatar image and avatar item stored in a specific avatar providing system, and requesting the corresponding avatar providing system to change the representative avatar image into the composed avatar image;

transmitting the avatar image change request to the avatar intermediating system; informing the avatar-using Internet service system or the avatar-using program of the user terminal on the basis of the avatar image change request that the avatar image is changed; and

receiving the avatar image from the corresponding avatar providing system according to the avatar image change request, and updating the representative avatar image of the avatar storage means on the basis of the received avatar image.

15 11. An avatar intermediating method according to claim 10, wherein the avatar image updating step includes:

receiving the avatar image change request, inputting a change request item (the user identification information and the avatar provider identification information) into a wait queue, and storing temporary avatar information (the user identification information 20 and URL of the temporary avatar) into a database;

reading the stored change request item from the wait queue and requesting transmission of the avatar data to the corresponding avatar providing device; and

receiving the avatar image transmitted from the corresponding avatar providing system to update the representative avatar image of the avatar storage means, and 25 restoring the temporary avatar information of the user information database.

12. An avatar intermediating method according to claim 11, further comprising the steps of:

5 in the avatar-using program informed of the avatar change from the avatar intermediating system:

transmitting the avatar display information including user identification information, kind of avatar, avatar countenance or the like to the avatar intermediating system in order to display the changed avatar image; and

in the avatar intermediating system:

10 determining whether the transmitted avatar display information is coincident with the avatar display information stored in the user information database;

determined whether an avatar included in the corresponding avatar display information is a temporary avatar or a formal avatar in case the information is coincident; and

15 updating and displaying the representative avatar image on the basis of the URL of the temporary avatar stored in the user information database in case of temporary avatar,

transmitting the avatar image stored in the avatar storage means to the user terminal, and updating and displaying the representative avatar image in case of formal
20 avatar.